Pacific Islands Fishery News

Spring 1997

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National Marine Fisheries Service
2570 Dole Street
Honolulu, Hawaii

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

U.S. Pacific Islands to Benefit From '96 Magnuson-Stevens Act

When he signed the 1996 Sustainable Fisheries Act into law late last year, President Clinton joined the U.S. Congress in ushering in a new approach to fisheries management and marine conservation, at the same time recognizing and helping the very special fishing interests and practices of indigenous Pacific Islanders.

A new provision in the Act, sometimes referred to as the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, requires the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council to take into account the various traditional, indigenous fishing practices in preparing fishery management plans.

The recently established Native and Indigenous Rights Advisory Panel will be working closely with the Council on these issues.

Also included in the new provision is the authority to establish programs aimed at increasing the share of economic benefits received by indigenous fishing communities within the Council's jurisdiction. These will include some of the area's richest commercial fisheries.

The new legislation also gives the people of American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Marianas a greater say in the management of fisheries within their respective EEZ's as well as new opportunities to profit from activities occurring within their respective zones.

For example, the governor of any of the three island areas may request that the U.S. Secretary of State authorize foreign fishing within their EEZ. Fees collected from these foreign fishing vessels in exchange for fishing rights will be "covered over" into the treasury of each respective U.S. Pacific Island to fund marine conservation projects. Fees collected under agreements for non self-governing islands, such as Wake, Midway and Palmyra, will be deposited into a new Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund to be used for fisheries management and conservation activities within the Council's jurisdiction.

But before entering into any such agreements with foreign fishing interests, American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands must each develop a three-year marine conservation plan showing how any revenues generated by such agreements will be used. The Council will work with each of the island governments on their respective plans. Each plan must address a number of conservation and management objectives, such as: observer program for foreign vessels, fisheries data collection and analysis system, marine and coastal resource assessments and habitat monitoring, marine conservation education, and marine resource development projects.

Though still early in the process, Japan has already expressed an interest in the pole-and-line fishery in the Northern Mariana Islands. The Council is already assisting the island areas in the development of marine conservation plans to prepare for any new foreign interest.

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NEW DEFINITIONS

The 1996 Sustainable Fisheries Act defines key "buzz words" in the latest amendments.

Bycatch - "fish harvested in a fishery, but which are not sold or kept for personal use, and includes economic discards and regulatory discards." Examples: walu, ribbon fish, etc

Commercial Fishing - "fishing in which the fish harvested, either in whole or in part, are intended to enter commerce or enter commerce through sale, barter, or trade." Example: Selling, bartering, or trading catch, i.e. part-time troll, bottom, etc.

Recreational Fishing - "fishing for sport or pleasure." Example: Fishing where the catch is not sold, bartered or traded.

The Council additionally has agreed to standardize use of the following terms:

Incidental Catch - "catch which is retained in whole or part but not necessarily targeted." Examples: moonfish, opah, and blue shark.

Interaction - "catch of protected species which is required to be released." Examples: seabirds, monk seals, and turtles.

Pacific Islands Fishery News

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Looking for a Few Good Pictures

Pacific Islands Fishery News is looking for good quality photographs featuring the Western Pacific Region, particularly commercial fishing photos. We are building a library and would appreciate any contributions of photographs, slides, videos, posters, and other materials that capture life and work in the Western Pacific fishery. It may be in color or black-and-white. We hope to receive enough free material to produce a calendar for 1998. For more information call Mark Segami at (808) 522-6044.

A Message From the Chair . . .

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all in the Pacific Ocean community to participate in our Council process. The basis of the Magnuson Act is regional fisheries management. In other words, management by people in touch with the resource. Participation by people like you and me is what makes the process work.

Here are several ways you can get involved:

(1) Call Ellen at 522-8220 and get on the Council's mailing list. You'll receive articles and publications of interest to the ocean community in addition to Council documents and event calendars.

(2) Apply for membership on one of several Advisory Panels focusing on pelagics, bottomfish, crustaceans, ecosystems, corals, and native rights. Members are chosen for their experience and interest in these areas.

(3) Each Advisory Panel meets at least once a year and often several times when important issues are at stake. The meeting schedules are sent to everyone on the Council's mailing list. Public input is solicited and welcomed.

(4) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council holds several meetings each year. We welcome and encourage public input. Meeting notices and agendas are announced well in advance of the meeting dates and times.

Send your correspondence and inquiries to:
Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1405
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel.: (808) 522-8220 Fax: (808) 522-8226

Please join us and participate in any capacity you choose. We operate with "Island style" informality and an intense commitment to your ocean resources.

Aloha,

Jim Cook

PORT CALLS

Risky Business, But High Profit Potential is Attractive

The port call. A break for the fishing crews and chance for the vessel to resupply and make repairs. No island port among the Pacific islands has seen greater success than Guam at meeting the needs of the commercial tuna fleets plying the central and western Pacific -- and cashing in on the growth of Pacific fishing activity.

Blessed by its proximity to important fishing grounds, shipping routes, major markets, as well as the availability of competitively priced fuel and other goods and services, the Guam Department of Commerce estimates that annual spending by the purse seine fleet alone may be as much as $100 million. GDC estimates that a single Korean purse seiner buys an average $475,000 in local goods and services per port call.

The Guam scenario differs from the historical image of the port call business. In the past, large numbers of ships typically mass near shoreside processing plants and packing/shipping operations. But the Guam experience shows that servicing these major fishing vessels on a regular basis can make important economic contributions to the local community.

Guam's "port call industry" is actually an offshoot of its tourist industry. Five major air carriers provide 10 daily flights between Japan and Guam. This ready access to the *sashimi* markets has been the primary attraction for the longline transshipment operations. Foreign longline tuna transshipments started on Guam in 1986 with fewer than 10 boats making port calls. By 1995, 447 boats of Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese registry made nearly 2,000 port calls, which resulted in expenditures totaling $44 million. To attract more foreign fishing vessels, the Guamanian Government is expanding port facilities at

Apra Harbor and encouraging local entrepreneurs to raise live milkfish, a preferred bait among longliners.

But this industry is not without high risk. Consider that pelagic tuna stocks and the vessels that pursue them are highly mobile. When the normal vagaries of commercial fishing are thrown into the mix, it's difficult for any island area to attract and retain the commercial fleets.

The Tinian facility in the Northern Marianas, for example, was for years a major tuna transshipment center. Lately, business is down as U.S. purse seiners have elected to relocate their tuna off-loading activities or withdrawn entirely from the fishery.

Hawaii too has found mixed results in trying to grab a piece of the business. In the 1980's, the state launched "Port Hawaii," a marketing campaign to promote use of its commercial ports and harbors. But closure of the tuna cannery at Kewalo Basin and the provisions of the U.S. Nicholson Act, which prohibits foreign flag fishing vessels from off-loading their catches in U.S. ports (Guam, American Samoa and the Northern Marianas are exempt from the Act) caused many domestic and foreign fishing vessels to seek ports of call elsewhere.

Prospects may yet improve for Hawaii as the Canadian and U.S. governments voice new interest in extending the *Pacific Coast Albacore Tuna Vessels and Port Privileges Treaty*. Honolulu is a candidate to be added to the list of open U.S. ports under the 1981 treaty. Terms of the agreement permit Canadian vessels to avail themselves of facilities and services at specified U.S. ports. Importantly, the Act also permits the Canadians to land their albacore catch. U.S. vessels enjoy reciprocal privileges in Canada.

The treaty has been a economic boon to some U.S. ports, particularly after the dramatic decline of the Northwest salmon fishery and the equally dramatic bumper harvests of North Pacific albacore. Many Canadian salmon fishers have switched to albacore. Last year, 63 Canadian trollers landed 1.6 million pounds of albacore at U.S. West Coast ports. All the landed fish were shipped frozen to U.S. or overseas canneries.

Hawaii's potential as a port of call to foreign fleets may be hampered by the limited number of docks that can handle the big vessels. Yet there's no denying that the potential is there for Hawaii -- and other island locales -- to pursue the growing business of Pacific port calls.

'Fix-it' Forgives First-timers

First-time offenders of minor technical violations will be allowed to correct the violations and avoid paying a fine, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Office of Enforcement and the U.S. Coast Guard, which are jointly implementing the President's new "Fix-it" notice program.

However, violations qualifying for a first-time break must meet the following criteria:

- The violations must be minor and technical in nature;
- There must be no direct impact on the resource;
- The "no penalty" offer applies only for the first violation of a particular requirement.

A Fix-it notice will not be counted as a prior violation and cannot be appealed. However, multiple Fix-it notice violations for the same offender may be included in the context of the larger picture and could lead to more serious violations.

For more information, call the NMFS Voluntary Compliance Coordinator at (310) 980-4050.

VMS Helps Hawaii Fisherman Save Catch in California

Quite recently, a longline fishing vessel registered in Hawaii stopped off in Long Beach, California, after working the swordfish stocks on the high seas. But when the boat tried to off-load the catch, the fish were confiscated by California authorities for lacking proper documents and for allegations that the fish were illegally caught within the California EEZ.

California authorities were unwilling to budge until the captain offered to "prove" he caught the fish on the high seas. A call was placed to the National Marine Fisheries Service Office in Hawaii where, by law, longline vessels are required to use the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS). Using VMS, NMFS officials in Honolulu were able to track the ship's signature and they confirmed that the vessel indeed did not fish within the EEZ off the West Coast. The catch was released, but the boat was still penalized for violating California reporting and paperwork regulations. A minor infraction compared to the very real possibility of losing the entire catch!

There are two morals to this true story. First, it pays to use VMS. Second, know the rules and regulations for areas you plan to visit. It can prevent a major hassle. The Council has requested all fish and wildlife regulations from California, Oregon, Washington and Alaska. If you are interested in a copy of these regulations, call 522-8220.

From left: Chair James Cook; Rollie Schmitten, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NMFS; Executive Director Kitty Simonds, Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye and John Sibert, Program Manager, PFRP, (rear) share a lighter moment during activities surrounding the 91st Meeting of the Western Pacific Council last November.

QUARTERLY PLANNER

Upcoming Council Events and Meetings

APRIL

8-10 **Scientific & Statistical Committee**
Ala Moana Hotel, Ilima Room
Honolulu, Hawaii 8:00 am - 5:00 pm

21 **General Advisory Panel Meeting**

22 **PIAFA Meeting** 9:00 am - 1:00 pm
FDCC Meeting 2:00 pm - 5:00pm
Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii

23 **Standing Committee Meeting**
Ala Moana Hotel
Honolulu, Hawaii 7:30 am - 5:30 pm

24-25 **92nd Council Meeting**
Ala Moana Hotel, Garden Lanai
Honolulu, Hawaii

MAY

7-8 **Pelagic Plan Team**
Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii

14-15 **Bottomfish Plan Team**
Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii

Please call 522-8220 to confirm meeting dates, times, and locations.

NEED AN ANSWER FAST? CALL DIRECT!

The Council's professional staff members are available to help you find answers to your fisheries questions. Whether your question is highly technical or more general in nature, we welcome your call. For faster service, call one of our specialists directly.

Bottomfish (Main Hawaiian Islands), Lobsters, Shrimp, Crabs, Coral Reefs, Ecosystems & Habitat ..... Robert Schroeder, 522-8223

Pelagics, Sharks, Sea Birds, Marine Turtles ..... Paul Dalzell, 522-6042

Bottomfish (Northwestern Hawaiian Islands), Enforcement, Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) ..... Mark Mitsuyasu, 522-6040

Economic and Cultural Issues, Precious Corals, Native Rights ..... Don Schug, 522-8224

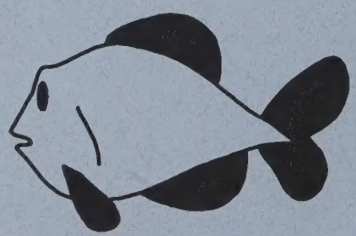
Public Education Programs, Public Information, Web Site, News Media ..... Mark Segami, 522-6044

Council Mailing List ..... Ellen Reformina, 522-8220

DID YOU KNOW?

Yellowfin Production Rate Still a Mystery to Scientists

The catch of yellowfin tuna is at record high levels. But some Hawaii fishermen are concerned about whether heavy fishing around the main Hawaiian Island may cause local depletion of the species. Yellowfin tuna stocks are still considered healthy on an ocean-wide scale. But scientists cannot provide direct answers to the concerned Hawaii fishermen for a very simple reason: there is just not enough information about the size and movement patterns of yellowfin tuna (*ahi*) around Hawaii.



Therefore, researchers at the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) laboratory in Honolulu and at the University of Hawaii are using indirect methods to search for evidence of yellowfin depletion around Hawaii.

The assumption is that if fishing is depleting a stock, then there should be a negative relationship between the catch and the catch rate. But when scientists used a statistical model to look at 30 years of commercial yellowfin tuna fishing records (1962-92), they found no pattern of localized stock depletion.

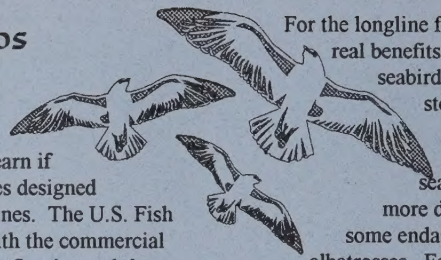
Instead, they found that yellowfin tuna catches did not decline when catch rates increased. The conclusion? The impact of commercial fishing on Hawaii's yellowfin tuna stocks cannot be detected just by looking at past and current levels of fishing. However, scientists are also quick to point out that this research is only one approach to addressing the issue of local tuna stock depletion. The issue -- and the questions -- are far from being settled.

Although tuna stocks in the Pacific Ocean as a whole are not considered to be overfished, there is no question that all species are not quite as abundant as they were 30 years ago.

Looking at it from a single fisherman's point of view, or from the point of view of a single location, the decline in overall abundance means slower migrations of new tuna to replace the ones already caught. And it means fishermen will just have to work harder to catch the same amount as they have in the past. But this is only a sign of lower abundance, not necessarily of local stock depletion.

One thing the research has done is heighten interest in yellowfin tuna fisheries on a regional scale. Stay tuned.

Saving Seabirds Helps Everyone



Federal officials are planning to conduct a one-year investigation to learn if seabirds react differently to techniques designed to keep them away from baited longlines. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, in cooperation with the commercial fishers, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, are currently looking at several different techniques being used to help reduce the accidental catch of seabirds by longline vessels (seabird bycatch).

For the longline fishers, there are some very direct and real benefits to ultimately finding a way to avoid seabird bycatch. The birds would no longer steal bait, thus increasing the chances of catching more fish. And, if longliners are no longer catching seabirds accidentally, there would be no more danger to the seabirds, particularly some endangered or highly threatened species of albatrosses. For more information on this important subject, or to receive a copy of translated documents in Korean or Vietnamese, please call the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council at (808) 522-8220.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bird Banding Lab, appreciates the help of the fishing industry in returning all information found on bands on the legs of seabirds, such as albatrosses. If the bird is already dead, please remove the band and send it to the Bird Banding Lab, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 12100 Beech Forest Road, Laurel, MD, 20708. Or you may give the information/ band to the person who collects log books.

Hawaii Sen. Inouye Praises, Warns Western Pacific Council

Hawaii Senator Daniel K. Inouye praised the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council for its leadership and achievements since its founding in 1976, but warned that the Council's work is far from finished.

Since its inception, the Council has been a leader in several major areas, including placing tuna on the list of federally managed species and being the first to implement the Vessel Monitoring System for enforcement within its longline fishery.

In his remarks to the audience at the Council's 20th anniversary, Inouye noted that the Council has overcome its status as an infant organization and "has earned the wide respect . . . as a force for sustaining the fishery resources of the Western Pacific."

The growing value of the pelagic fisheries in the Western Pacific region, Inouye said, underscores the importance of the role that the Council must continue to play.

"Working as partners with the Pacific Island nations, American Samoa, Guam and (the) Northern Mariana Islands, (the Council) will continue to be crucial to our national ability to conserve a resource upon which the future of the world, most literally, will rely," Inouye said.

Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye (center) joins several of the charter members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council during ceremonies celebrating the Council's 20th anniversary last November in Honolulu. From left are: Peter Fithian of Honolulu, Paul Bordallo of Guam, Frank Goto (Honolulu) and Louis Agard (Honolulu).

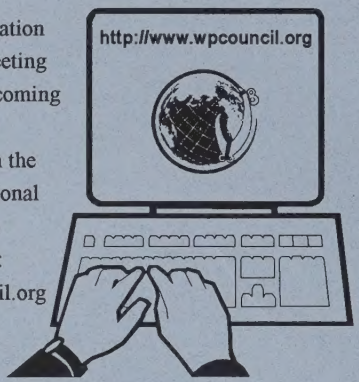
AROUND THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGION

Co-owner Timm Timoney prepares the bottomfisher F/V Laysan for another trip out of Honolulu's Kewalo Basin.

Richard Seman (standing) talks with Northern Mariana Islanders about the need for a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) such as the one extensively and effectively used around Hawaii for enforcement purposes in the longline fishery.

Visit The Council's Web Site!

Get the latest information on the hot issues, meeting agendas, reports, upcoming events and scientific articles of interest on the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Managment Council's web site at: http://www.wpcouncil.org



Lobster Harvest Guideline Set

The lobster harvest guideline for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands fishery for 1997 will be set at around 320,000 lobsters by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The announcement was expected shortly after the joint meeting of the Hawaii Crustacean Plan Team and the Hawaii Crustaceans Advisory Panel in March.

The two expert teams also examined the issue of high-grading and concluded that in 1996, they could find no substantial economic basis for high-grading. High-grading is the practice of discarding catch in order to make room for catch of higher value.

A full report will be made at the 92nd meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, scheduled for April 24-25, 1997, at the Ala Moana Hotel.

Meetings Focus on Tuna, Pelagics

Several major gatherings scheduled in the next few months are strongly focused on tunas and other pelagics. The first major meeting occurs on May 19, at Lake Arrowhead, California, when the 48th Tuna Conference gets underway.

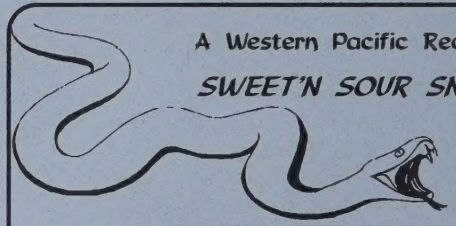
Also, May 19-23 are the dates tentatively selected for a regional workshop on the handling and grading of high-priced tuna in Tonga. The workshop is organized by the Coastal Fisheries Program, South Pacific Commission.

Fiji will be the site for two important meetings on June 16-20. First, the South Pacific Commission Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish will hold its ninth meeting. Meanwhile the Western Pacific Yellowfin Research Group will be holding its 7th gathering. Both meetings are scheduled to take place in Nandi.

On June 24, in Majuro, the Forum Fisheries Agency/ South Pacific Commission, will convene its 2nd Multilateral High-Level Conference on Tuna.

A Western Pacific Recipe:

SWEET'N SOUR SNAKE



1 LB. SKINNED BROWN TREE SNAKE, CUT INTO 1-INCH PIECES
1 CAN BEER
2 T. VINEGAR OR LEMON JUICE
1/2 CUP SUGAR
3 T. SOY SAUCE
1/2 CUP WINE
3 CLOVES GARLIC, CRUSHED
6-7 SLICES FRESH GINGER
CORNSTARCH/WATER MIXTURE
CHILI PEPPER (OPTIONAL)

BOIL SNAKE IN BEER FOR 30 MINUTES. DRAIN. COMBINE WITH REMAINING INGREDIENTS AND COOK FOR 30 MINUTES OVER LOW FLAME. ADD CORNSTARCH MIXTURE TO THICKEN.

Recipe courtesy of Guam Division of Aquatic & Wildlife Resources

Magnuson-Stevens Act Gives Fishery Councils Added Clout

Perhaps one of the most important new developments under the '96 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is the provision that gives the eight U.S. regional fishery management councils the authority to comment on any activity by any U.S. government agency that might affect Essential Fish Habitats (EFHs). Understanding what constitutes EFHs is important to conserving fisheries through an ecosystem approach.

The Act mandates that the National Marine Fisheries Service establish guidelines for the regional fishery management councils, such as our Council, in describing and identifying essential fish habitat.

The Act defines an EFH as: "those waters substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or for growth to maturity." Also included is specific language for key concepts and words such as:

- **waters** -- which include aquatic areas and their associated properties used by fish;
- **substrate** -- which includes sediments, geological features underlying the waters, and associated biological communities such as coral reefs, etc.
- **necessary** -- habitat required to support a managed species at a target production level.
- **spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity** -- the species' full life cycle, including prey species.

In addition to commenting on the activities of other federal agencies, the Council may recommend management measures for any actions by government agencies that might affect EFH's.